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President Reagan's Framework for Peace

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Following is an address by William Clark, National Security Adviser to the President, before the City Club and Chamber of Commerce, San Diego, California, October 29, 1982.

It is a special honor for me to join you today. I'll attempt to provide a status report on the President's efforts to restore U.S. leadership in the resolution of the many difficult issues facing us in international affairs. To set the stage for that, it is useful to recall the agenda before us when the President entered office and to recall the climate in which we had to operate.

As you know, the decade of the 1970s was not a happy one—as measured by U.S. fortunes in international politics. This reality was the consequence of many factors. The political legacy of the Vietnam war included, among other things, a serious questioning of the reliability of the United States as an ally. A separate and unrelated factor was the dramatic and very visible expansion of Soviet military power. This military ascendancy was accompanied by an increased Soviet willingness to take risks in its efforts to expand its influence beyond its borders. Starting with their sponsorship of Cuban activities in Angola and proceeding more visibly in their subversive efforts in Ethiopia and South Yemen, the Soviets became ever more bold in the absence of any apparent U.S. opposition. This trend of reticence, and uncertainty on our part, called into question our sense of purpose and resolve among our friends in Europe and elsewhere.

Another important factor was a substantial increase in our reliance, and that of our allies, on overseas resources for fueling our economies. The effect of this and other events at home—with no apparent answers on our part—led us to the brink of economic catastrophe. These events and trends led the United States to be viewed from abroad—by the Soviet Union as well as our friends—as a nation in decline. We were seen as unreliable and, basically, as unable to solve problems, either our own or theirs.

The challenge facing President Reagan at the outset of his Administration was to rally the Western world by demonstrating that the United States could once more lead in the resolution of these problems and play a positive role in international affairs.

Getting Our Own House in Order

Faced with this agenda, the President charted his course toward basic objectives which individually and collectively were designed to restore a measure of stability and peace within the international community and to foster economic growth and development among nations. There were compelling domestic reasons for devoting foremost attention to restoring economic stability here at home. Clearly, our economy and the

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American people were at a breaking point with interest rates above 20% and double-digit inflation. But it is equally true that no nation can deserve the respect of others in the resolution of problems if it cannot solve its own. It is also true, that the commanding position of the dollar and the diversity and reach of U.S. industry are essential to sustain recovery internationally.

For all of these reasons, the President set to work to put our own house in order. It is gratifying today to note evidence that we have clearly turned the corner. Who would have thought, 20 months ago, that interest rates would drop 50% and that inflation would drop by an even greater percentage? That is progress and, as the President has said, there is more in store if we only stay the course.

Rebuilding the Foundation

The second essential task to keeping the peace was to restore the foundation of strength which underwrites the concept of deterrence. For a number of reasons, the United States had allowed its investment in defense to decline steadily in real terms throughout the decade of the 1970s. We had not designed a new strategic missile since the late 1960s; our newest B-52 was built more than 20 years ago. Conversely, the average age of Soviet systems is less than 5 years.

This decline took place at a time when the Soviet Union was accelerating the most dramatic expansion of military power in the history of mankind. The U.S.S.R. passed the United States in terms of defense spending in 1971; in the course of that decade, their military investment exceeded ours by over $200 billion.

This dramatic expansion of Soviet power was translated into political effect by the very apparent increase in Soviet willingness to take risks, such as those in adventures I have already mentioned in developing countries from Africa to Afghanistan.

As a result of the President's initiatives, the program of rebuilding is now well launched, and if we will show the resolve to sustain it in years ahead, there is every promise that effective deterrence will endure and that peace can be preserved for our own and future generations.

Reciprocity and Restraint

The next important goal, in the President's judgment, was the reestablishment of a firm basis for U.S.-Soviet relations. In the course of his first year in office, the President made clear to Soviet leadership that he is willing to work seriously with them toward resolution of the full range of international problems on the basis of reciprocity and restraint. At the same time, he has made it equally clear that we will not stand mute in the face of Soviet-inspired repression, subversion, or direct aggression whether it takes place in Poland, Central America, or Afghanistan. It is in this area that the President has drawn criticism for his actions—specifically on sanctions imposed following the Soviet-inspired crackdown in Poland. To the President, those events before last Christmas provided contemporary confirmation that the Soviet Union has not altered its commitment to extend its false revolution, wherever possible, beyond its borders. That choice is obviously theirs to make; but there is another way—should they wish to take it. The opportunity for enjoying the benefits of free trade and peaceful discourse within the international community is clearly an option they could effect.

For as long as the Soviet Union continues to deprive its people and to divert its resources into a massive military buildup, the United States—at a minimum—will not contribute to that process by providing the technology, hardware, or credits to make the Soviet tasks easier. In this commitment, we believe it is reasonable to expect the support of other nations who share our values and our principles.

Arms Control

In the nuclear age—and particularly after a decade of such astonishing Soviet expansion of its arsenal—it remains the leading priority of every American president to prevent conflict and to seek to reduce the level of nuclear armament. The same concern is being expressed today by growing numbers of Americans. This emerging public interest in the control of nuclear weapons is an extremely healthy and welcome phenomenon. It can serve to enlighten the American people on the basic concepts and systems which determine the stability or instability of peace in the nuclear age. However, throughout the past 37 years, the subject of strategic nuclear weapons has been shrouded in secrecy, jargon, and rather arcane concepts which most people would find difficult to understand. The result has been that on the most important public policy issue of their generation, the American people have been uninformed. Thus, for that reason alone, the current debate represents a very useful exercise.

Let me digress for a moment to give you a couple of examples of the kind of misinformation that has clouded public attitudes on this subject. If I were to ask you whether the United States today possesses more or less explosive power (megatonnage) than it did 20 years ago, I am sure most of you would respond that we have more. The truth is that today's level is less than half that which existed during the Kennedy Administration. Similarly, if I were to ask whether we have more—or fewer—warheads than we had 10 years ago, I am sure most would respond that we must have more. The truth, however, is that in the course of the past decade, we have reduced the number in our arsenal by about one-third.

But my point is not to belabor statistics. The President believes that regardless of the level, it remains too high and that we must do everything we can to reduce it. It is toward this objective that the President directed the development of sound, equitable arms control positions with which to seek to engage the Soviet Union in a serious program of reductions. That directive was to serve two purposes: first, to deal with strategic weapons and, second, effect reductions of intermediate-range weapons such as the Soviet SS-20 which threaten our friends in Europe and elsewhere.

With regard to intermediate-range weapons, the President has proposed to the Soviet Union that if they will agree to dismantle all of their land-based missiles, now numbering more than 300 globally, we will forego deployment of corresponding systems to counter. In other words, we propose a zero-zero balance. Our negotiators are now engaged in Geneva with their Soviet counterparts in an effort to persuade them of the benefits of this outcome, not only for their security but for all mankind. We hope that before long they will see the wisdom in this proposal.

With respect to strategic or intercontinental weapons, the President has proposed dramatic reductions to equal numbers on both sides—approximately a one-third reduction in the number of ballistic missile warheads and a reduction in deployed ballistic missile launchers to one-half of the current U.S. level. Here again, our negotiators are hard at work in Geneva seeking to reach Soviet agreement on this proposal.

It is in the context of these negotiations that it is worthwhile to consider a proposal that has been made both by President Brezhnev and by large numbers of well-meaning people in this country. They have urged that we adopt an immediate freeze on the production, testing, and deployment of nuclear weapons. The very simplicity of the freeze proposal has made it attractive, especially by those who are put off by the perceived complexity of the issue. But it takes little more than common sense to identify the flaws in such an approach.

For example, if you were asked if you would support a unilateral freeze, I am sure most of you would say no. But if we could not verify Soviet compliance with a bilateral freeze agreement, it would effectively constitute a unilateral freeze agreement. How could we be sure that the Soviet Union was abiding by a freeze proposal? Frankly, our experience in this area is not encouraging, and, as a consequence, it behooves us not to take for granted Soviet good faith where the margin for error is very small indeed.

Apart from the question of verification, it is also reasonable to ask whether it is sensible to freeze in place an imbalance which has resulted from a decade of Soviet building and U.S. decline. Here again, it is instructive to consider the existing imbalance in the category of intermediate-range forces. I mentioned earlier that the Soviet Union now possesses more than 300 SS-20 missiles which can reach all of Western Europe and many other parts of the world. Neither the United States—nor any of our allies—possesses any corresponding land-based system which can reach the Soviet Union. An imbalance of 300–0, which grows to 600–0 when the other Soviet INF [intermediate-range nuclear forces] land-based missiles are included, is neither fair nor does it contribute to stable peace. It is for this reason that we are in negotiations in Geneva in an effort to persuade the Soviets to dismantle those systems.

And this leads me to my third point. What would be the effect of a freeze on our hopes for progress in these arms control talks? To answer this I need only to ask you to put yourself in the place of the Soviet Union. If you are in a position where the balance is in your favor in a 600–0 ballgame and the other side agreed to freeze that imbalance, what possible incentive would you have for continuing to negotiate or play ball at all?

In short, because an immediate or instant freeze presents extremely problematical verification questions, because it would freeze a substantial imbalance in place, and because it would remove incentives for the Soviet Union to negotiate reductions, a freeze would not contribute to effective arms control. And it is for this reason that the President has proposed that we first reduce nuclear weapons to equal levels before adopting a freeze.

President Reagan is deeply convinced that with persistence and seriousness of purpose we can reach agreements which truly reduce the size of the nuclear arsenals on both sides. He is reinforced in this conviction by the record of negotiations which have taken place thus far, and with your support he will continue to pursue them to a successful conclusion.

Relations With Developing Countries

The fifth objective of this Administration in foreign affairs is to establish a new basis for conducting our relations with the developing countries of the world. The President's approach relies heavily on the energy of the private sector. It is most graphically represented in the program known as the Caribbean Basin initiative. Under this program, the President has blended a combination of trade, aid, and incentives for investment into a carefully balanced arrangement to facilitate the self-help effort of the people of the Caribbean region. We hope during the special session of the Congress—commencing next month—to achieve enactment of the trade and tax provisions of this program, providing incentives for U.S. businesses to invest in the Caribbean area. Through this process, together with modest amounts of aid and improved access to overseas markets, we believe we can give hope to the people of this area who have lived for so long in despair, experiencing worsening conditions of trade with no change in sight.

Peacemaking

The sixth goal of President Reagan's foreign policy—and perhaps its centerpiece—concerns our responsibility as a peacemaker. Since the earliest days of his Administration, the President has directed that a maximum effort be devoted to lending U.S. prestige and resources to the resolution of disputes throughout the world. Most recently we have devoted extremely intense efforts to furthering the peace process in southern Africa and in the Middle East.

For longer than any of us can remember, the people of the Middle East have lived from war to war with no apparent prospect for any alternative future. Because it is our moral obligation and because of our important interests in the area, the President has focused his personal attention on the history of this dispute and all of its complexities. The results of his analysis were reflected in his remarks to the American people on September 1. In a nutshell, the President was asking a very simple question to each of the three forces in the region.

- To Israel, which in 34 years has experienced five wars, he asked: How is your security best assured? Is it by maintaining control over territory with the virtually certain expectation of war every few years, or is your security not better assured by reaching a political accommodation with your neighbors?
- To the Palestine Liberation Organization, which has experienced devasting defeat three times in the past 12 years, the President asked: Is arms struggle truly the best way to establish Palestinian identity?
- And more generally to the Arab states of the area, he asked: Has confrontation with Israel for the past generation truly served your interest?

The President believes deeply that we face an historic opportunity which must not be missed. In his exchanges thus far since September 1, we have received encouraging signs from many quarters. He is hopeful that in the weeks ahead we will succeed in reopening talks for establishing transitional arrangements in the West Bank and Gaza district through such a process which must involve the participation of other Arab countries. The peoples of this area can bring to an end this dark chapter of their history and look forward to a new era of development and prosperity. The President has pledged his best efforts to make this dream come true.

In some parts of the world, the word "peace" is lightly said, because peace in those parts is a reality—a reality more or less taken for granted. In the Middle East, the word "peace" is weighty, almost palpable, because the reality seems so out of reach. We in the United States need to remind ourselves of the importance of shaping a perfect peace that may be only a goal, if in seeking that goal we are able to keep or improve on the peace we have.

I wish now to speak briefly on a related matter. In a speech 2 days ago, Mr. Leonid Brezhnev addressed the top Soviet military command. He spoke of the Soviet Union's dedication to a peace threatened by American "adventurism." We perceive the purpose of his speech was to reassure the Soviet military establishment that it continues to retain its favored place in Soviet society. His remarks about improved Soviet-China relations were meant to create an impression of improving international relations. All of this was predictable.

But to represent the Soviet Union as the advocate of a meaningful peace threatened by the United States is hardly convincing. If the Soviet Union continues year after year to pour some 15% of its gross national product, two-and-one-half times our own, into its military establishment, it is not because it faces external threat but because it needs this kind of a force to keep its own population under control, to intimidate its neighbors, and to support imperial adventures in far-away Africa, Central America, and Southeast Asia.

Although Mr. Brezhnev is not running for office, he is nevertheless a politician, and his appeal to nationalism and militarism must be interpreted in these terms. But how can we take seriously unfounded accusations clearly designed as nothing but an excuse for intensifying still further the Soviet Union's already enormous military buildup?

The U.S. record is clear. It did not use its nuclear power when it enjoyed a nuclear monopoly. It has offered, time and again, meaningful proposals of arms limitations and reductions. It has scrupulously adhered to the terms of treaties and accords. It has—without reciprocity from Moscow—reduced its military budget for years. Our current military effort has—as its principal purpose—assurance of a credible deterrent in the face of prodigious military advances the Soviet Union has made during the years of U.S. self-restraint. We make no apologies for our role in the pursuit of peace, which we continue to pursue. ■

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